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Schools [in the Ottawa Valley]
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(CONFIDENTIAL)

REPORT ON
ENGLISH-FRENCH SCHOOLS

[in the Ottawa Valley]

TORONTO, January 9th, 1909.

DEAR SIR:—

In compliance with the instructions contained in your letter No. 3865 T. 4.16789, of October 30th, to ascertain the general conditions and necessities of the English-French schools in the Ottawa Valley, I beg to submit, for your consideration, the following report and recommendations:—

SCHOOLS INSPECTED.

I visited the following schools;—

In the Inspectorate of A. Belanger:

Ottawa—Guigues School, Murray Street.
—Breboeuf School, Anglesea Square.
—Youville School, Water Street Convent.
—Garneau School, Cumberland Street.
—St. Pierre School, Friel Street.

The Brook, (S.S. No. 6, Clarence).
S.S. No. 13, Clarence.
S.S. No. 14, Clarence.
S.S. No. 16, Clarence.
Clarence Creek (S.S. No. 5, Clarence).

In the Inspectorate of V. H. Gaboury:

Sturgeon Falls.
S.S. No. 1, Springer.
S.S. No. 3, Springer.
S.S. No. 5, Springer.

In the Inspectorate of W. J. Summerby:

S.S. No. 6, Plantagenet.
S.S. No. 12, Plantagenet North.
S.S. No. 15, Plantagenet North.
Plantagenet Village.

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These schools were selected because they were regarded as types. At Ottawa and Sturgeon Falls are found full graded schools. At Plantagenet, the Brook, and Clarence Creek, the classes are mixed or partially graded. The remaining schools are typical of the various phases of the rural situation. The schools show variety in organization, and the teachers differ widely in ability, experience, and training. Some schools have been long established; others are but newly organized. Some are in prosperous communities, and others are supported by settlers who are struggling to make homes for themselves in new districts. Most schools are attended by French speaking children only, but in a few the attendance is made up partly of English speaking children.

THE SITUATION.

Language of Instruction.

The atmosphere of the schools is undoubtedly French. The language of the teacher in conversing with the pupils or in giving general directions is French. The children use French in their ordinary conversations in the school and on the playground. The language of instruction in Forms I and II is almost exclusively French. In all but a few schools French is also used in teaching the subjects of Form III. Where a Fourth Form exists, the subjects of the Entrance examination are usually taught in English, but in three schools I found French used mainly in this grade. In the latter schools, translation was resorted to whenever the interpretation of English or English expression was demanded. For example, in one of these schools, where I observed an arithmetic lesson, the pupils used the Public School Arithmetic, but translated the problem into French with the aid of a dictionary and after working them re-translated the results into English. In the same school, French-English dictionaries were used very freely in writing English compositions.

Where English speaking pupils are in attendance at the bilingual schools, they are, as a usual thing, taught in the ordinary classes along with the French speaking children. In the Separate school at Sturgeon Falls, where the proportion of

English speaking pupils is comparatively large, they are, for certain grades, placed in forms by themselves.

The Study of English.

Efforts are being made in all schools to teach English, but the greatest diversity exists in the time devoted to the subject, in the methods of instruction, and in the results.

The subject always found is English Reading. In most cases the results, in so far as the mechanics of reading are concerned, may, under the circumstances, be pronounced fair, but very frequently pupils attain expertness in uttering the words, without any appreciable understanding of the matter read. Where the bilingual readers are used, the connection between the idea and the English word is made through the French expression. In other words, pupils "think in French" and translate. These readers must be regarded as a failure. In fact, whenever any translation method is relied on, the pupils' range of English is found to be restricted, and their use of the language uncertain and slow.

English conversation, as distinguished from English reading, finds a place in most schools. The best that can be said is that a fair beginning has been made in the development of the subject. Teachers have carried the work up to a certain point and seem to lack the knowledge and skill necessary to continue it. It is a simple matter to teach pupils a few notional words representing common objects in and about the school. Difficulty is experienced in widening the range and in introducing the rational words necessary to consecutive thought and expression. A few teachers have been able to meet the conditions, and their work is an unqualified success. In two schools, one a graded school in a French speaking community, and the other a rural school in a section containing but one English speaking ratepayer, I found most of the pupils in the third forms able to carry on a general conversation in English and to read with intelligence and to write English. Since the children had had no opportunities of mingling with English speaking people, they must have learned their English at school. In the same schools good work was also done in all other subjects.

I am convinced that pupils can be given, in a reasonable time at school, a good working knowledge of English without interference with their advancement in other subjects.

English composition is very much neglected in all schools, and English literature is taught systematically only in classes preparing for the Entrance examination.

I have no means of estimating with accuracy the proportion of pupils who have facility in using English on leaving school. My observations lead me to say that a conservative estimate would possibly be 15 per cent. of those leaving from the third forms, and 75 per cent. of those graduated from the fourth forms. Since only a small fraction of pupils reach the higher of these standards and many do not reach the lower, the percentage on the whole must be low.

The Study of French.

All pupils begin French reading when they enter school and most continue it to the end of the third form. Many fourth forms have also classes in French reading.

Formal French grammar is taught in most schools. Systematic lessons in French composition (the writing and correction of letters, themes, etc.) are not common. Apart from the study of the reading lessons, French literature receives no attention. On the whole, the proficiency of the pupils in French cannot be said to be satisfactory.

Standing of Pupils in Other Subjects of Study.

As in ordinary English schools, arithmetic receives a great deal of attention. In a few schools elementary number work is introduced through object teaching, but in most, the methods are more or less formal. Pupils in the second and third forms are, as a usual thing, quite expert in calculations involving the simple rules, but do not appear to have the same power in solving problems as pupils of the same grade in English schools. Some exceptions must be made to the last statement. In one school visited, the pupils were much above the average in arithmetic.

The lessons in geography consist principally in the rote repetition of work prepared from maps, text-books, or notes. The matter in several schools was taken from helps published as aids to candidates preparing for the Entrance examination. The course in geography as outlined for the different grades in the new curriculum is not followed.

History was not found in the lower grades. In the upper classes the subject is taught through notes and text-books. French texts in history are in fairly common use.

Drawing in some form has a place on most time-tables. The work even in the best schools is meagre.

There are no manual training centres connected with schools. Some of the classes in Ottawa receive instruction in this department at the Normal school. A few of the teachers who have had training are endeavouring to introduce elementary constructive work into the lower classes.

Nature Study is not systematically followed up in any of the schools. Here and there attempts are being made to do a little work.

The hand-writing of the pupils is on the average as good as that of pupils of the same age in English schools.

Qualification of Teachers.

Most of the weaknesses in the English-French schools are directly traceable to lack of training and experience in the teaching staffs.

While a few teachers are well equipped for their work, many schools are in charge of young, inexperienced girls of poor academic qualifications and little or no professional training.

The natural ability of those engaged in teaching is certainly quite up to the average. One has no standard by which to measure mathematically native capacity, but my general impression is that an exceptionally large proportion of French-Canadian young women have the instincts and temperament of the teacher. Weaknesses are in most cases but manifestations of lack of training. In fact, no situation could probably afford

a better opportunity of judging of the effects of training on teaching power. If one were sceptical about the necessity of teacher-training, his opinions would be changed by a visit to the bilingual schools.

Text-books.

The following books were found in the schools:—

English Readers.

In the Public Schools:

Bilingual Readers.

Ontario Readers.

The High School Reader.

In the Separate Schools:

Canadian Catholic Readers.

Ontario Readers.

High School Readers.

French Readers.

In the Public Schools:

Bilingual Readers.

Méthode de Lecture, by Rochon.

In the Separate Schools:

Méthode de Lecture by Rochon, Books I and II.

Lectures Graduées (a third book) by Christian Brothers.

Lectures Choiesies (a fourth book) by Christian Brothers.

Lectures Choiesies (a fifth book) by Leroy.

Third, Fourth, and Fifth Readers by Montpetit.

Fourth Reader by Magnau.

English Grammar.

Public School Grammar.

High School Grammar.

French Grammar.

Elementary Course by Christian Brothers.

Intermediate Course by Christian Brothers.

Advanced Course by Christian Brothers.

Grammaire Élémentaire by Robert.

Grammaire Complete by Robert.

Grammaire Française by Labrousse.

Grammaire Élémentaire by Larive et Fleury.

Speller.

Gage's Practical Speller.
Exercices Orthographiques by Robert.

French Composition.

Méthode de Style et de Composition by Robert.
Leçons de Style by Constans.

Arithmetic.

Public School Arithmetic.
High School Arithmetic.
Exercices d'Arithmétique by Rochon.
French Arithmetics by Christian Brothers.

Geography.

The Public School Geography.
The Earth by Rose.
The World by Rose.
Géographie (cours élémentaire) by Christian Brothers.
Géographie, illustrée (cours moyen) " "
Géographie (a French adaptation) by Millar.
Entrance Geography Notes by Henderson.

History.

Public School History.
Histoire du Canada (cours élémentaire), Christian Bros.
Grandes Lignes de l'Histoire du Canada by Sadlier.
British and Canadian History Notes.

Algebra and Geometry.

Public School Euclid and Algebra.
High School Algebra.
Geometry for Schools by Baker.

Physiology.

Public School Physiology.

Notes on Literature.
School and Home Exercises.

Discipline, etc.

The discipline in the English-French schools is excellent. Teachers have uniformly good control and the pupils are well behaved. One of the most notable features of the schools is the politeness of the children. This is manifest, not only in the formal reception of visitors by the classes, but especially in conversation and in acts of courtesy in the school and on the playground.

Attitude of the People.

I found everywhere among the French-Canadians a manifestly growing interest in elementary education. It is expressed in the conversation of the people, and in the increased provisions made for the maintenance of schools. Old buildings are being rapidly replaced by modern structures in the older districts. A large proportion of the schools have the "minimum equipment," and many have the nucleus of a library. In the newer sections, the pupils are, as a rule, comfortably housed, and the equipment is all that under the circumstances can reasonably be expected. In several sections the trustees were present at the inspection and showed that they were taking an intelligent interest in the progress of the schools.

Although in many cases the teaching of English is in manifest favour, there is on the whole great indifference, but little, if any, active opposition to it. It was generally admitted by those who discussed the subject with me that the child who grows up in an English speaking continent without acquiring freedom in speaking and writing English is likely to be greatly handicapped in life's struggle. But while there is practically no opposition to English, there is a very strong feeling, closely connected with racial, religious, and national sentiment, that the French language must be maintained. Hesitancy in supporting the study of English is frequently the result of the fear that it will eventually lead to the suppression of French.

SUGGESTIONS FOR RECONSTRUCTION.

Organization and Methods of Instruction.

It must be admitted that one of the most important aims of the English-French school is to secure to the pupils whose mother tongue is French a working knowledge of English. The necessity for the attainment of this end complicates the organization and affects materially methods of instruction in the schools.

Language of Instruction.

Touching both organization and methods of teaching, the first and probably the most pressing question is that of the language of instruction.

It is obvious that in the beginning the teacher's means of communication with the child must be the mother tongue. The language of instruction in all subjects except the study of the English language should be mainly French up to the end of Form II. From what I have observed, I am convinced that if proper attention be given to English conversation, reading, and composition in the lower grades, English may be made the medium for teaching all subjects except the French language and literature in all forms above the Second. But under the conditions likely to prevail in most schools, the principle should be accepted that the transition from French to English should be made during the period the child is in the Third Form. At the end of this time the most backward child should have sufficient freedom in the use of English, both in speaking and in writing, to follow with comparative ease lessons conducted in English. Although the practice which I have recommended should in the main be adopted, I am aware that no absolute limitations as to the use of the language of instruction can be laid down. In some of the best schools I found English as well as French used in teaching elementary number work, and French had now and then to be resorted to in the higher classes to convey a delicate shade of meaning, or lead to the appreciation of a subtle feeling.

Some of the teachers I met argued somewhat strongly for the retention of French as the language of instruction throughout the course, contending that since the child thinks most naturally in the mother tongue he is greatly handicapped in pursuing a subject of study, when there is placed upon him the added difficulty of acquiring and using a strange language. These teachers would continue English as a subject of study to the end of the course. The results have condemned the plan. Wherever the method has been followed the pupils' attainments in English have been found unsatisfactory. The reasons are obvious. When English is regarded simply as one subject among a number, as is French in the ordinary Ontario High School, the attention given to it is necessarily inadequate. Again, skill in the use of a language comes only through constant practice. As French is the language spoken almost exclusively in his home and among his companions, the school offers the child his only opportunity of gaining a mastery of English. While formal language lessons must suffice in the lower grades, nothing short of the constant use of the language as a means of communication between pupil and teacher will give sufficient practice in the upper grades.

Nor does experience show that the pupil's progress in the ordinary subjects is retarded as much as might appear by the necessity of learning and using a strange tongue. I found, as I have pointed out, both in graded and rural schools, third and fourth form classes proficient in English and at the same time well up in other subjects.

Where the attendance at a school is made up partly of English speaking and partly of French speaking children, the pupils of each section should in the lower grades be taught the ordinary subjects in classes by themselves. At the same time all pupils should be encouraged to take advantage of the special opportunities offered to acquire both languages.

The Teaching of English.

It is generally conceded that the method which has been commonly in vogue in the English-French schools of teaching English through translation, either by means of bilingual readers or otherwise, has proved a failure. It should be discontinued

and a more natural method adopted. In the primary stages, the lessons should be entirely conversational. The subjects of conversation should be objects, pictures, actions, etc., and words should be directly associated with ideas. As soon as a few notional words are acquired, relational words should be introduced. Questions and answers should as far as possible be thrown into the form of sentences, the pupils being introduced at first to the most familiar forms for asking, asserting, denying and commanding. Sustained conversation should as soon as practicable be made to replace single questions and answers.

No reading book should be employed with pupils in Part I. of the First Reader, but the conversation lessons should cover all the words used in this book. To assist in these conversations, the illustrations used in the reader should be presented in enlarged form on cards. The first reading should be done from the blackboard. When the pupils begin to read from the book, each lesson should be introduced by a conversation to make sure that the pupils are familiar with the forms and meanings of the words to be used. As early as possible the pupils should be trained to express their thoughts in written form.

When English becomes the language of instruction, the formal exercises in conversation should be discontinued and their place taken by systematic work in written composition, and the literature lessons should be practically of the same character as those in English schools.

The amount of time to be devoted to English in each grade should be prescribed, and, if practicable, the exact period of the day should be specified. It should also be understood that during one half of the day, say the forenoon, the language of the school should be English, that is to say, that during this time all school commands, directions, etc., should be given in English, and that as far as possible English be used for the purposes of conversation during the recess periods.

The Teaching of French.

The provision for the systematic study of French has been almost as unsatisfactory as for the study of English. This is especially true of the study of French in the upper forms.

Practically the only argument heard against the study of English in these schools is that through it French comes to be neglected. While one may not agree with the reasons assigned, he cannot dispute the results. In English speaking sections of Ontario, educational boards and individuals spend large sums of money to give children the benefit of the training that comes through the study of the French language and literature. Should we not look upon our heritage in the French language as an intellectual asset and do what is possible to make it the vehicle of a higher culture? The aim should be to improve pronunciation, to give grammatical accuracy to speech, to secure facility in written composition, and to awaken an interest in French literature. Oral language lessons, as well as French reading, should form a part of the course of the lower grades, and French composition, with the necessary minimum of Grammar, and French literature should be more systematically and seriously studied in the upper forms. If practicable, recognition might be given to French as a subject of study at the Departmental Examinations for Entrance to the High Schools.

It does not follow that the study of English necessarily means the displacing of French or that the study of French prevents the acquisition of English. I found that in the schools where French was best taught, the pupils were most proficient in English, and *vice versa*. While this is partly accounted for on the principle, which is undoubtedly true, that the mastery of one language is a direct aid to the study of a second, it is due mainly to the fact that in the good schools the teachers are faithful and efficient, and all subjects are well taught.

Other Subjects of Study.

The language studies in the English-French schools are the only subjects that present special problems for consideration. The character of the work to be undertaken in other departments should be practically the same as in the English schools.

Text-books.

In the general reconstruction of text-books, the English-French schools should not be overlooked. The works in language naturally need special attention.

Text-books in English.

The readers, grammars, and other texts used by pupils in the English schools may also be used in the English-French schools. A manual covering the whole field of the teaching of English to French pupils should be prepared as a guide to the teacher. It should be more than a Departmental circular giving general suggestions and instructions. What is required is a complete hand-book containing a detailed outline of work in conversation for each of the lower grades, with illustrative lessons and discussions of methods. It should also give instructions regarding the place of elementary reading and written composition and the best methods of introducing them.

As has already been pointed out, many teachers make a good beginning in applying natural conversational methods, but through lack of knowledge and materials, are unable to continue beyond a few simple lessons. Such a work as I have described should give assistance at every step. It should be made a text-book in the training school for teachers, and a copy should be placed in every English-French school. Until such time as a work can be prepared that will meet more directly the requirements, I recommend that the teachers-in-training at Ottawa be given a thorough course in the Berlitz methods with the use of Berlitz texts.

Text-books in French.

A new series of French readers should be prescribed. The Rochon readers are based on a correct principle and have proved fairly satisfactory. Experience has shown that a number of improvements might be made in them. Some of the more desirable changes may be briefly summarized as follows :—

If possible, the phonic elements should in the beginning be derived from the analysis of words whose meanings are familiar to the child and not presented as independent, meaningless sounds. In the selection of the words for the reading lessons, emphasis should be placed on their meaning for the child, as

well as upon their suitability for phonic synthesis. The early exercises for reading should contain, as far as practicable, simple sentences, not isolated words. The course should proceed by more gradual steps. More attention should be given to a study of the capacities and especially the interests of children in the selection of material for the reading lessons. I recommend either that arrangements be made for the publishing of a new edition of the readers, embodying these improvements, or that a new series based on the same principle be prepared.

On account of the diversity of inflections and idioms in the French language, a systematic study of its grammatical forms seems necessary at an earlier stage than in English. To meet this need, a simple work in composition and grammar should be provided. At present, the demand is supplied by a variety of French grammars (see list on page 6). All appear to be defective in that the presentation of the subjects is made through formal rules. What is needed is a practical language book which will lead the pupil in an inductive way through the study of typical concrete forms to a formulation of general principles.

Text-books in Arithmetic.

Most teachers tell me that they feel the need of an elementary work in arithmetic written in French. They are too busy, especially in rural schools, to devote sufficient time to the subject to give the requisite practice through oral and blackboard lessons alone. In the earlier stages, pupils are not sufficiently advanced in English to make use of the ordinary text. A French translation of the earlier chapters of the authorized text-book would probably meet the requirement.

Text-books in Other Subjects of Study.

Oral work should suffice in all other subjects in the elementary grades, and the authorized English texts should be used in the upper forms.

Supply of Teachers.

The teacher is the key to the solution of most educational problems. This is most peculiarly true of the bilingual situation in Ontario. Given a sufficient force of well selected and trained teachers who have a clear and sympathetic grasp of the needs of the English-French schools, and of the means of supplying them, most of the direct ends to be attained in the organization of these schools might be realized within a generation.

But it would appear that the situation is such that it must be a long time before this condition can be even approximately fulfilled. Two reasons may be given: First, the number of qualified persons presenting themselves for training as teachers is small; second, the training of teachers for these schools offers some special problems not found in the training of ordinary teachers. The second of these obstacles can be readily overcome by the organization of proper training schools. The first is by far the more serious. The teachers-in-training must necessarily come from the French speaking population. So far, it has been impossible to secure from this source a sufficient number of candidates with the proper academic standing to take up the work of training. The difficulty arises mainly from the fact that the secondary schools in the eastern part of the province are not to any great extent patronized by the French speaking people. Different causes are assigned. It may be partially accounted for on the ground that the interest awakened in the elementary schools has possibly not yet extended among the masses to secondary or higher education. But the chief reason, in my opinion, is that the secondary schools do not appeal to the French people because no provision is made for the study of the French language and literature by the pupils whose mother tongue is French. If a French speaking teacher of good literary attainments were engaged in each High School in a French district to continue systematically the study of French, begun in the elementary schools, the most weighty objection to the Provincial High Schools would, in my opinion, be removed. Much would, at any rate, be done to induce pupils in the elementary

schools to continue their studies. At Plantagenet and Rockland, where the practice has, even under more or less unsatisfactory conditions, been adopted, the attendance at the High Schools is large, considering the population of the districts. If the same proportion of the French speaking children in the city of Ottawa were in attendance at a High School, we should soon have an abundant supply of teachers for all the bilingual schools in the Ottawa Valley. I am aware that it is the province of the local boards to interpret and deal with local conditions, and that little can be done by the Department apart from the initiative and hearty cooperation of the Boards of Education in the centres concerned. All reasonable efforts in this direction should receive the sympathy and support of the Government.

It is evident that it will be some time before a material increase in the attendance of pupils in the larger centres may be expected. In the meantime the most promising immediate source of increased supply are the Continuation Schools in the small centres of population. These should be specially fostered by the Department.

But I am not certain that a sufficient number of candidates can be had from all these sources combined. It will probably be found necessary to organize in connection with the training schools, preparatory departments, providing academic courses leading up to the professional classes. It may also be necessary to give pupils financial assistance. This is a question I have not investigated.

The whole question should receive the most careful attention, not alone on account of the necessity for providing the bilingual schools with teachers, but also because it is but a phase of a much wider and, in some respects, more important problem, that of opening up the way to secondary and higher education to a much larger proportion of the youth of Eastern Ontario.

Training of Teachers.

The bilingual situation demands the existence of special schools for the training of English-French teachers. Two schools are necessary. The Ottawa school should be continued and

placed on a more permanent basis, and another school should be established in the Nipissing district. Sturgeon Falls is probably the best point for a new school. It is the centre of a large French speaking population. The Separate school, if reorganized, would furnish satisfactory provision for observation and practice teaching. The sentiment of the people there is, I believe, favourable to the success of the school.

My observations convince me that these schools should not be looked upon as mere temporary expedients. The conditions are such that they are liable to be found necessary for many years.

The present system of renting rooms from year to year is unsatisfactory. Buildings and equipment should be owned and controlled by the Government. A four-roomed building, constructed in such a way that it could be enlarged if necessary, would supply at first sufficient accommodation for each school.

The permanent staff of each school should consist of two teachers, one proficient in English, the other in French. These teachers should both be familiar with public school subjects and methods. Part-time teachers might, as at present, be engaged for special subjects.

In the organization of these schools, more adequate facilities should be provided for observation and practice teaching. Conditions at Ottawa are at present unsatisfactory, mainly because the teachers in the affiliated schools can take but little part in the illustrative teaching and criticism work.

Provision should be made in the Normal Schools at North Bay and Ottawa for training second class teachers in the special work required of bilingual teachers. Optional courses should be offered in French language and literature and in the teaching of English to French speaking children. The schools should also offer facilities for observation and practice teaching in bilingual schools.

Summer schools should be held at Sturgeon Falls and Ottawa for the improvement of those holding temporary certificates. Sessions of three weeks duration should immediately precede

the opening of the schools in autumn. The time, if necessary, might profitably be taken from the first weeks of the school term. All persons holding or applying for temporary certificates should be required to attend. The Bilingual Inspectors should have charge of the classes. The subjects taught should be mainly English conversation and reading, French reading and composition, and elementary number work. Any spare time might be given to modern methods in geography, history, and art work.

I am indebted to Inspectors Belanger, Gaboury, and Summerby for their courtesy and assistance. They did their utmost to aid me in making myself familiar with the situation, and placed freely at my disposal the results of their observations and experience.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your obedient servant,

F. W. MERCHANT.

Chief Inspector of Public and Separate Schools.

HON. R. A. PYNE, M.D.,

Minister of Education.

